



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on January 17, 2014

Israel Engages Pro-Palestinian EU in Diplomatic Duel

Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman [called in the ambassadors](#) of Britain, France, Italy, and Spain on January 17 to "stress to them that their perpetual one-sided stance against Israel and in favor of the Palestinians is unacceptable and creates the impression they are only seeking ways to blame Israel," said his spokesman.

A statement released by the ministry said that Lieberman asked that the envoys be told that "Israel is making great efforts to enable the continued dialogue with the Palestinians."



"Beyond being biased, unbalanced and ignoring the reality on the ground, the positions held by these [EU] states significantly harm the possibility of reaching some sort of agreement between the sides," the statement read, as quoted by AFP news.

Lieberman's spokesman told AFP that the envoys were being summoned for a Friday, January 17 meeting. Another Israeli official told AFP that calling in ambassadors for a same-day meeting was a rare move indicative of the degree of offense caused.

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The controversy between Israel and the four EU members is the result of a diplomatic dispute over an announcement from Israel's housing ministry a week ago that Israel plans to build 1,400 new housing units in settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Following the announcement, the four EU nations summoned Israel's ambassadors in London, Paris, Rome, and Madrid to register the respective nations' disapproval of the Israeli settlement expansion.

Shortly after returning from a January 16 meeting in Amman, Jordan, with King Abdullah II, Netanyahu directed a strongly worded statement at the EU, accusing it of "hypocrisy" in condemning Israel's settlement construction, but not the Palestinians for incitement or continued terrorism, the [Jerusalem Post](#) reported.

The EU's high representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, has said that the building of the settlements is "an obstacle to peace and threatens to make the two-state solution impossible." Netanyahu, speaking at a reception held in Jerusalem for foreign journalists, condemned Ashton's statement and asked when the EU countries last called in the PLO ambassadors to "complain about incitement to Israel's destruction," or to protest that security officers from the Palestinian Authority were participating in terrorist attacks against innocent Israelis.

"I think it's time stop the hypocrisy and inject some fairness in the discussion," [said Netanyahu](#). The prime minister added that what he described as the EU's impartiality does not promote peace, but actually pushes it further away because "it tells the Palestinians that they can engage in incitement and terror and not be held accountable."

"The EU calls our ambassadors in because of the construction of a few houses? When did the EU call in



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the Palestinian ambassadors about incitement that calls for Israel's destruction?" asked Netanyahu.

AFP reported that the tense exchange between Israel and the EU members followed an earlier exchange between Israel and the United States after Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon launched a tirade against Secretary of State John Kerry for acting out of "misplaced obsession and messianic fervor" while attempting to broker a framework peace deal with the Palestinians by April. Israel's [Yediot Ahronot](#) newspaper quoted Ya'alon as saying in private conversations with Israeli officials that "The American plan for security arrangements that was shown to us isn't worth the paper it was written on."

Knesset Member Amram Mizna called Ya'alon's remarks "shameless."

"It's absurd and it lacks responsibility that he's sending poison arrows to the Americans," said Mizna.

The White House described Ya'alon's words as "inappropriate" and "offensive."

Yaalon later issued an apology, saying he "had no intention to cause offense." A [statement](#) issued by Ya'alon's office said, "The defense minister ... apologizes if the secretary was offended by words attributed to the minister."

Israel and the United States share "a common goal" of advancing peace talks with the Palestinians, the statement said, adding, "We appreciate Secretary Kerry's many efforts towards that end."

Going to the heart of the incident that prompted the latest Israel-EU exchange — Israel's announcement last week that it would build additional housing units on land the Palestinians have claimed for their new state — [Netanyahu has added](#) a bloc of Israeli-settled land near the Palestinian governmental seat in the occupied West Bank to a list of enclaves Israel intends to retain after any peace deal with the Palestinians, reported Reuters.

Netanyahu's spokesman declined to comment on the report, announced on Israel's Army Radio on January 16. The report noted that the plan would leave 13 percent of the West Bank under Israeli control. This is more than the 8.5 percent of West Bank land that will be enclosed by Israel's still-under-construction security barrier.

There was no immediate comment from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, reported Reuters, but a Palestinian official, who asked not to be identified, rejected the notion of Israel keeping large clusters of settlements.

"We are saying that once we agree on the withdrawal to 1967 borders, we can accept minor exchanges of land on a case-by-case basis," the official said, referring to lines — described by Israel as indefensible — predating the war in which Israel captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

Israel withdrew from violent Gaza in 2005, but continues to occupy much of the West Bank area. Following a split within the Palestinian National Authority in 2006, the more radical Hamas faction gained control of Gaza, while the less-violent but still-radical Fatah faction retained control of the West Bank.

At the conclusion of the 1948-49 Arab-Israeli War, the West Bank was controlled by Jordan, which granted Jordanian citizenship to Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. During the 1950s, many Palestinians refugees settled in the West Bank, some of them fomenting violence against Israel, which prompted Israeli reprisals. However, most Palestinians were merely seeking a home and wanted to live in peace. Their ranks even included a small minority of Christian Arabs.



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After the 1967 Six-day War, and Israel's occupation of much of the West Bank, Jordan decided to withdraw from the area. In 1988, Jordan's King Hussein announced "full legal and administrative disengagement from the West Bank," and subsequently severed all Jordan's administrative and legal ties with the area.

The radical Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) filled the vacuum created when Jordan withdrew. Because of its violent nature, the PLO was considered by the United States and Israel to be a terrorist organization until the Madrid Conference in 1991. Former PLO head Yasser Arafat appointed Mahmoud Abbas as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority on March 19, 2003. Abbas became the chairman of the PLO on November 11, 2004 upon the death of Arafat and became president of the PA on January 15, 2005. When Arafat was elected as president of the PA in a landslide victory in 1996, both Israel and the United States refused to negotiate with him because of his past terrorist connections. Abbas remains as chairman of the PLO and president of the Palestinian National Authority.

And so the stand-off continues. The majority of peace-loving Palestinians want a place to call home, but their perceived homeland has come under the control of terrorists and former terrorists who have tried to clean up their image. Israel understandably wants to protect itself from terrorist attacks, but has often usurped authority it does not have over territory it has no claim to under international law. It is not a situation that John Kerry or any other American can, or rightfully should, solve.

Photo of Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman: AP Images

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